

12

EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION

45 Date of publication of the patent specification:
30.05.90

71 Application number: 86301488.2

22 Date of filing: 03.03.86

51 Int. Cl.⁴: **C07K 7/00, C07H 21/04,**
C12N 15/00, C12P 21/02,
G01N 33/569, G01N 33/543,
A61K 39/21

54 **HTLV III Polypeptides.**

30 Priority: 01.03.85 US 707066

43 Date of publication of application:
29.10.86 Bulletin 86/44

45 Publication of the grant of the patent:
30.05.90 Bulletin 90/22

84 Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH DE FR GB IT LI LU NL SE

56 References cited:
EP-A-0 152 030
US-A-4 520 113

BIOTECHNOLOGY, vol. 3, no. 10, October 1985,
pages 905-909, New York, US; **TSE WEN CHANG et al.:**
"Detection of antibodies to human T-cell lymphotropic
virus-III (HTLV-III) with an immunoassay employing a
recombinant Escherichia coli-derived viral antigenic
peptide" 000
NATURE, vol. 313, no. 6002, 7th February 1985,
pages 450-458, London, GB; **M.A. MUESING et al.:**
"Nucleic acid structure and expression of the human
AIDS/lymphadenopathy retrovirus"
SCIENCE, vol. 226, no. 4679, 7th December 1984,
pages 1165-1171; **G. SHAW et al.:** "Molecular
characterization of human T-cell leukemia

73 Proprietor: **Chang, Tse Wen**, 1504 Sugartown Road,
Paoli Pennsylvania 19301(US)
Proprietor: **Kato, Ikunoshin**, 108 West Glamorgan Court,
Exton Pennsylvania 19341(US)
Proprietor: **Chanda, Pranab**, Colonial Towers, 1-2, Paoli
Pennsylvania 19301(US)
Proprietor: **Chang, Nancy T.**, 1504 Sugartown Road,
Paoli Pennsylvania 19301(US)
Proprietor: **Putney, Scott D.**, 102 Gloucester Street,
no. 2, Arlington Massachusetts 02174(US)

72 Inventor: **Chang, Tse Wen**, 1504 Sugartown Road, Paoli
Pennsylvania 19301(US)
Inventor: **Kato, Ikunoshin**, 108 West Glamorgan Court,
Exton Pennsylvania 19341(US)
Inventor: **Chanda, Pranab**, Colonial Towers, 1-2, Paoli
Pennsylvania 19301(US)
Inventor: **Chang, Nancy T.**, 1504 Sugartown Road, Paoli
Pennsylvania 19301(US)
Inventor: **Putney, Scott D.**, 102 Gloucester Street, no. 2,
Arlington Massachusetts 02174(US)

74 Representative: **Holdcroft, James Gerald, Dr., Graham
Watt & Co.** Riverhead, Sevenoaks Kent TN13 2BN(GB)

56 References cited: (continuation)
(lymphotropic) virus type III in the acquired immune
deficiency syndrome"
NATURE, vol. 313, no. 6000, 24th January 1985,
pages 277-284, London, GB; **L. RATNER et al.:**
"Complete nucleotide sequence of the AIDS virus,
HTLV-III"

Note: Within nine months from the publication of the mention of the grant of the European patent, any person may give notice to the European Patent Office of opposition to the European patent granted. Notice of opposition shall be filed in a written reasoned statement. It shall not be deemed to have been filed until the opposition fee has been paid (Art. 99(1) European patent convention).

Description

This invention is in the fields of immunology and virology.

Human T cell lymphotropic virus-type III (HTLV-III) has been isolated from many patients with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). More than a hundred isolates have been obtained and although genetic variants with different restriction enzyme restriction maps have been observed sera from more than 90% of patients with AIDS or AIDS-related complex (ARC) contain antibodies reactive with the prototype isolate H9/HTLV-III-82. J. Schupbach et al. *Science* 224, 503 (1984); M. G. Aam-gadharan et al. *Science* 224, 506 (1984). This not only suggests that HTLV-III is the causative agent of AIDS but also indicates that the anti-HTLV-III antibodies are highly crossreactive with the various genetic variants of the virus.

Groups reported to be at greatest risk of contacting AIDS include homosexual or bisexual males; intra-venous drug users and recent Haitian immigrants to the United States. Hemophiliacs who receive blood products pooled from donors and recipients of multiple blood transfusions are also at risk. Clinical mani-festations of AIDS include severe immune deficiency which generally involves a depletion of helper T lymphocytes, various opportunistic infections and Kaposi sarcoma. These may be accompanied by malignancies and infections. All AIDS patients die within 2-3 years of diagnosis. ARC patients may exhibit lymphadenopathy and depressed helper T cell counts; there is not, however, the devastating illness characteristic of full-blown AIDS. It is not now possible to predict who among them will develop the more serious symptoms.

Much of the evidence implicates HTLV-III as the etiological agent of the infectious AIDS. First, there is consistent epidemiology; greater than 80% of the patients with AIDS have antibodies specific for HTLV-III as revealed by Western blot analysis and solid phase immunoassays. Second, there has been reproducible identification and isolation of virus in this disease; as mentioned, more than 100 variants of HTLV-III have been isolated from AIDS patients. Third, there has been transmission of the disease to normal healthy individuals who received blood transfusions from infected blood donors.

Since the identification of HTLV-III as the probable cause of infectious AIDS and the establishment of a permissive T cell line for mass production of the virus, substantial progress has been made in characterizing the virus and in developing of diagnostic methods for the detection of HTLV-III infection. Most notable is the development of solid-phase immunoassays employing inactivated HTLV-III as a whole virus antigen immunoabsorbent for the detection of antibodies against HTLV-III in sera of patients. Such assays have been shown to detect antibodies in more than 80% of sera from patients with AIDS or ARC, or from individuals infected with HTLV-III and thus are useful for diagnosing AIDS and for screening contaminated blood.

Assays employing the whole virus, however, have several drawbacks. Large quantities of the virus must be cultivated as supply for test reagents. Although rigorous safety measures can be instituted, there are dangers associated with large scale cultivation of the infectious virus. Further, there exists a risk, however small, that test reagents prepared with the inactivated virus can be contaminated with live virus. Thus, persons who handle the reagents may be subjected to the risk of HTLV-III infection.

This invention pertains *inter alia* to immunochemical assays for detecting antibodies against HTLV-III employing an HTLV-III antigenic polypeptide produced by recombinant DNA methodology. The HTLV-III antigen, designated HTLV-III polypeptide 121, contains 83 amino acids and is probably derived from a viral envelope protein. Immunochemical assays utilizing the peptide are highly sensitive, specific and reproducible. The assays are an alternative to assays based on the whole virus which are equivalent, if not superior, in performance. The assays can be used to screen blood or other bodily fluids for presence of HTLV-III and to diagnose AIDS.

HTLV-III polypeptide 121 was identified by a shot gun cloning technique in which fragments of the HTLV-III genome were randomly cloned as fused genes into *E. coli* and expressed as a tripartite fusion protein which was strongly immunoreactive with AIDS patient sera. The HTLV-III DNA segment of the fused gene was sequenced and based upon this information, the amino acid sequence of the HTLV-III derived portion of the fusion protein (polypeptide 121) was assigned. The polypeptide was later determined to be encoded by a segment of the *env*-*lcr* region of the HTLV-III genome (nucleotides 7259 - 7503). The polypeptide 121 DNA segment was re-engineered into a DNA expression vector and was expressed in *E. coli* at levels of up to 5% of total cellular protein as a different tripartite fusion protein consisting of 41 amino acids of *E. coli*, the 83 amino acid residues of the HTLV-III polypeptide 121 and 14 amino acids residues encoded by the nucleotides forming a multiple cloning site of the cloning vector. This fusion protein was purified to homogeneity by a three-step fractionation procedure examined for reactivity with anti-HTLV-III antibody.

Immunoassays employing the recombinant peptide as the immunoreactive agent reliably and reproducibly detected anti-HTLV-III antibody in sera of patients with HTLV-III infection. In two representative serum panels, anti-HTLV-III antibody was detected in 99% (120/121) of sera from patients with AIDS and only 1 of 92 normal controls. Because the peptide is a defined, single component, better homogeneity and less variability can be achieved than with the disrupted virus, giving rise to less background immunoreactivity in immunoassays based upon the polypeptide. As a result, fewer false positive results are generated.

HTLV-III polypeptide 121 can be biosynthesized by genetic engineering techniques either as the amino acid residue peptide or as a part of a larger fused polypeptide containing exogenous peptide elements in its N-terminal and C-terminal. DNA segments which encode polypeptide 121 can be isolated from the viral genome or synthesized chemically. The polypeptide can be synthesized chemically by techniques of organic protein synthesis.

The polypeptide can be used in assays of various types including immunometric assays and antigen-sandwich assays. A preferred type of assay is a solid phase immunometric (double antibody) assay. HTLV-III polypeptide 121 is immobilized by attaching it to solid phase to form an antigen immunoabsorbent. The immunoabsorbent is used to adsorb anti-HTLV-III antibody from a sample of the biological fluid. The adsorbed anti-HTLV-III antibody is detected with an anti-(human IgG) antibody which is labeled radioisotopically, enzymatically, fluorometrically or in other ways. This second antibody, directed generally against human IgG, binds to anti-HTLV-III antibody adsorbed to the immunoabsorbent and produces a detectable signal which can be evaluated as an indication of the presence of anti-HTLV-III antibody in the sample.

The immunochemical assays employing HTLV-III polypeptide 121 provide several advantages over those based on the whole virus. Assays based upon HTLV-III polypeptide 121 eliminate the need to grow large quantity of the infectious virus. This alleviates the risk associated with this process. Additionally, assay reagents based upon the HTLV-III antigen rather than the whole virus will help mitigate the real or perceived risk of contracting AIDS by technicians who perform the assay.

In performance, assays employing HTLV-III polypeptide 121 are excellent. HTLV-III polypeptide 121 is a single, well defined component which provides a reproducible assay exhibiting less variability. For example, in solid phase assays, background label associated with the immunoabsorbent is low. Further, the assays are surprisingly highly sensitive and specific. Because the polypeptide presumably exhibits far fewer epitopes than the whole virus and consequently should be reactive with a smaller fraction of the antibody against the virion, the high sensitivity and specificity was not expected. In the immunometric assay, the polypeptide detected the presence of anti-HTLV-III antibody in 99% of sera of patients with AIDS and ARC. The very high specificity of the assay suggests that HTLV-III polypeptide 121 is derived from a highly antigenic portion of the virion and that antibody against the antigen is evoked in virtually all instances of HTLV-III infection. These performance characteristics provide for highly accurate screening of blood and other bodily fluids for the presence of HTLV-III and for greater precision in the diagnosis of AIDS.

Because of the apparent strong antigenicity of HTLV-III polypeptide 121, it could be used as a vaccine against the virus.

The invention provides HTLV-III polypeptide 121 of the formula:

```

Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
Thr Ser Leu

```

and modifications of said polypeptide 121 in which amino acids have been deleted, inserted or substituted without essentially detracting from the immunological properties thereof.

The invention also comprehends HTLV-III-based fusion proteins and DNA segments; and an expression vector in which the DNA segment is inserted, or a cell transformed with said expression vector.

The invention further comprehends immunochemical assays and methods for detecting antibody against HTLV-III; and immunoabsorbents and vaccine compositions: all utilizing HTLV-III-based material according to the invention.

In the accompanying drawings:

Figure 1 is a comparison between solid phase immunoabsorbents using recombinant HTLV-III antigen, polypeptide 121, and inactivated, disrupted HTLV-III as antigen.

Figure 2 shows assay results on sera samples from patients with AIDS or ARC and from normal individuals with immunoradiometric assays employing recombinant HTLV-III polypeptide 121 as a solid-phase immunoabsorbent.

In embodiments of the invention, HTLV-III polypeptide 121 was expressed and identified by a shotgun cloning procedure. This procedure is described in detail in United States Patent Application Serial No. 659 339 (EP-A-185 444). For completeness, the procedure is outlined here and described in further detail in the Exemplification Section below.

Cloned HTLV-III DNA was broken into fragments of approximately 500 base pairs in length and inserted into the "open reading frame" (ORF) cloning and expression vector pMR100; pMR100 is available to the public under American Type Culture Collection Accession No. 53321. The inserted DNA was ex-

pressed in *E. coli* transformants as tripartite fusion proteins, consisting of an HTLV-III polypeptide fused to λ CI protein at its N-terminal and beta-galactosidase at its C-terminal. About 300 clones were found to express beta-galactosidase activity indicating expression of the tripartite fusion proteins. AIDS patient sera containing anti-HTLV-III antibodies were used to screen for fusion proteins that were immunoreactive. Among twenty clones which produced proteins reactive with the AIDS sera, one clone, designated clone #121, expressed a fusion protein which was immunoreactive with all AIDS patient sera examined (24/24). The highly immunoreactive protein produced by this clone was selected for further study.

The HTLV-III DNA segment of clone 121 was excised from pMR100 and sequenced by the Sanger technique. The nucleotide sequence is as follows:

ATT GAG GCG CAA CAG CAT CTG TTG CAA CTC ACA GTC TGG
GGC ATC AAG CAG CTC CAG GCA AGA ATC CTG GCT GTG GAA
AGA TAC CTA AAG GAT CAA CAG CTC CTG GGG ATT TGG GGT
TGC TCT GGA AAA CTC ATT TGC ACC ACT GCT GTG CCT TGG
AAT GCT ACT TGG AGT AAT AAA TCT CTG GAA CAG ATT TGG
AAT AAC ATG ACC TGG ATG GAG TGG GAC AGA GAA ATT AAC
AAT TAC ACA AGC TTA

Based upon the DNA sequence, the putative amino acid sequence of the HTLV-III polypeptide could be assigned. This sequence is given below.

Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
Thr Ser Leu

The pMR100 tripartite fusion protein synthesized by clone 121 was difficult to purify in sufficient quantity for sera screening because the expression level was low (approximately 1.0% of total cellular protein) and the protein was insoluble in conventional extractive buffer (probably due to the existence of 23 half-cystine residues). In order to enhance expression the HTLV-III polypeptide in *E. coli* the HTLV-III segment of clone 121 was cloned into a high expression vector. *E. coli* transformed with the recombinant vector expressed a 15 Kd fusion protein with short fusion partners at both ends (41 amino acids of *E. coli*, the 83 amino acid residues encoding by HTLV-III polypeptide and 13 amino acid residues encoded by a multiple cloning site of the vector). The amino acid sequence of the fusion protein is:

Leu Arg Pro Val Glu Thr Pro Thr Arg Glu
Ile Lys Lys Leu Asp Gly Leu Trp Ala Phe
Ser Leu Asp Arg Glu Asn Cys Gly Ile Asp
Gln Ala Ser Ala Val Asp Ala Cys Gly Ser
Pro
Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
Thr Ser Leu
Trp Gly Ser Gly Thr Arg Glu Leu Glu Phe
Leu Lys Thr Lys Gly Pro Arg Asp Thr Pro
Ile Phe Ile Gly

Because of the insolubility of this fusion protein in non-denaturant buffers, a unique approach was taken to purify it. The procedure entails three steps. First, about 75% soluble cellular protein was removed from *E. coli* cell lysates with a non-denaturant buffer (50 mM Tris HCl, pH 7.6, 5 mM EDTA and 0.1 mM phenyl methyl sulphonyl fluoride). The fusion protein was contained in the insoluble cell pellet at approximately 20% purity. The fusion protein was then solubilized under extreme denaturing conditions (8 M urea or 6 M guanidine HCl). The pellet was suspended in a denaturing, extraction buffer containing 8 M Urea and 10mM dithiothreitol (DTT). DTT is a reducing agent which was added to prevent the formation of intra- and intermolecular disulfide bridges by the 6 half cystine residues of the HTLV-III peptide. The suspension was homogenized and then centrifuged. In the final step, the supernatant containing the solubilized fusion protein was purified by ion exchange or gel filtration chromatography in 8 M Urea and 10 mM DTT. The resultant product was chemically pure (98% by weight) and immunoreactively pure as judged by Western blot analysis.

The purified HTLV-III polypeptide 121 was evaluated for its ability to detect anti-HTLV-III antibody in AIDS and ARC patient sera.

HTLV-III polypeptide 121 was compared to HTLV-III as an antigen immunoabsorbent for anti-HTLV-III antibody. The polypeptide (0.2 µg) and the virus (at the maximal amount coatable) were coated onto wells of polyvinyl chloride plates. Serum sample was incubated in the well and ¹²⁵I-goat-anti-(human IgG Fc) antibody was used to assess adsorbed anti-HTLV-III antibody. For all samples tested, the amount of label associated with the HTLV-III polypeptide 121 immunoabsorbent was greater than with the inactivated virus immunoabsorbent. These results suggest that even though the immunoabsorbent employing purified recombinant HTLV-III peptide may absorb only a specific fraction of the antibodies against HTLV-III in sera of AIDS patient (i.e. only those directed against the epitopes of this particular viral antigen), it probably has the capacity to adsorb all or most of the antibodies specific for it. The immunoabsorbent with the disrupted virus probably can absorb antibodies reactive with most virion proteins. However, probably due to the steric hindrance of dominant antigenic determinants, the loss of antigenicity during virus purification or the insufficiency of certain viral components on the solid phase, it can adsorb only a portion of the antibodies. The polypeptide 121 immunoassay gave rise to less background immunoreactivity than assay employing the whole virus. This is probably because HTLV-III polypeptide 121 as a more defined, single component, is more homogeneous and a less variable reagent than the whole virus.

Next, the solid phase assay was used to analyze panels of serum samples from patients with AIDS or ARC, from other high risk individuals, and from healthy normal controls. The assay detected anti-HTLV-III antibody in sera of 120 out of 121 patients with AIDS or ARC. Among the clinically healthy individuals who were either homosexual males or who had sexual contact with AIDS patients, the immunoassay detected all of those who had been shown to be positive by a Western blot analysis. In fact, many of AIDS and ARC sera, which demonstrated undetectable or marginal reactivity in Western blot analysis, were clearly positive in the immunoassay. The single AIDS serum missed by the immunoassay did not show an immunoreactive band in Western blot analysis. Among 92 sera of normal healthy controls, only 1 was slightly above background level. This particular serum did not show an immunoreactive band by Western blot analysis.

The very high specificity and sensitivity of HTLV-III polypeptide 121 in immunoassays for anti-HTLV-III antibody is a surprising phenomenon. The polypeptide displays far fewer epitopes than the whole virus, yet it is reactive with 99% of AIDS and ARC patient sera and at very low concentrations it can detect anti-HTLV-III antibody. Because of the small numbers of epitope relative to the whole virus, the polypeptide would be expected to exhibit lower specificity because the fraction of anti-HTLV-III antibody reactive with it should be smaller than the fraction reactive with the whole virus and thus be less sensitive and specific. The unexpectedly high specificity may be explained by potent antigenicity of the polypeptide. It appears that in virtually all cases of HTLV-III infection antibody against polypeptide 121 (or the corresponding naturally occurring form of the antigen) are elicited.

When the DNA sequence of the HTLV-III genome was deciphered, (see United States Patent Application Serial No. 659,339 (EP-A 185 444)), the gene segment encoding HTLV-III polypeptide 121 was localized in a portion of the *env*-*lcr* region of the genome. This indicates that polypeptide 121 is probably a part of the P160 and P41 viral proteins which are believed to be capsid proteins.

Identification of the HTLV-III gene segment which encodes polypeptide 121 and determination of the amino acid sequence of the polypeptide opens the way to several techniques for producing the polypeptide. Recombinant DNA techniques, including those described herein and others, may be used to produce the polypeptide. HTLV-III now can be routinely and reproducibly isolated from patients with AIDS and propagated in a line of permissive T cells developed for this purpose. M. Popovic *et al.* Science 224, 497 (1984); R. C. Gallo *et al.* Science 224, 500 (1984). From such cells HTLV-III proviral DNA can be obtained and cloned. Polypeptide 121 coding region of the HTLV-III genome which has been identified can be excised from the proviral DNA, inserted into an expression vector, preferably one which express the polypeptide at high levels, and expressed in transformed host cells.

Alternatively, DNA segments encoding HTLV-III polypeptide 121 can be synthesized chemically. Several techniques are available for synthesizing the DNA segment or equivalents.

HTLV-III polypeptide 121 is a part of the naturally occurring form of an HTLV-III antigen. Thus, the gene which encodes the entire antigen probably encompasses or overlaps the identified polypeptide 121 sequence. This gene can be cloned and expressed and the product may display equivalent or even superior reactivity with AIDS patient sera. In addition, other segments of HTLV-III DNA which encompass the polypeptide coding region or those which overlap this region and DNA segments which are modified by deletion, insertion or substitution of nucleotides may also yield HTLV-III polypeptides which exhibit the immunological properties of polypeptide 121. The term HTLV-III polypeptide 121 is inclusive of all of these different forms of the antigen.

In addition to genetic engineering techniques for synthesizing polypeptide 121 or its equivalents, the polypeptide can be synthesized directly by procedures of chemical protein synthesis. For example, polypeptide 121 can be synthesized by the solid phase procedure of Merrifield. As in the biosynthesis of the polypeptide, modified polypeptides can be synthesized chemically which are immunologically equivalent to HTLV-III polypeptide 121. For example, the polypeptide structure can be altered by addition, deletion or substitution of amino acid residues.

Immunochemical assays employing HTLV-III polypeptide 121 can take a variety of forms. The preferred type is a solid phase immunometric assay. In assays of this type, the HTLV-III polypeptide 121 is immobilized on a solid phase to form an antigen-immunoabsorbent. The immunoabsorbent is incubated with the sample to be tested. After an appropriate incubation period, the immunoabsorbent is separated from the sample and labeled anti-(human IgG) antibody is used to detect human anti-HTLV-III antibody bound to the immunoabsorbent. The amount of label associated with the immunoabsorbent can be compared to positive and negative controls to assess the presence or absence of anti-HTLV-III antibody.

The immunoabsorbent can be prepared by adsorbing or coupling purified HTLV-III polypeptide 121 to a solid phase. Various solid phases can be used, such as beads formed of glass, polystyrene, polypropylene, dextran or other material. Other suitable solid phases include tubes or plates formed from or coated with these materials.

Polypeptide 121 can be either covalently or non-covalently bound to the solid phase by techniques such as covalent bonding via an amide or ester linkage or adsorption. After the HTLV-III polypeptide is affixed to the solid phase, the solid phase can be post-coated with an animal protein, e.g., 3% fish gelatin. This provides a blocking protein which reduces nonspecific adsorption of protein to the immunoabsorbent surface.

The immunoabsorbent is then incubated with the sample to be tested for anti-HTLV-III antibody. In blood screening, blood plasma or serum is used. The plasma or serum is diluted with normal animal plasma or serum. The diluent plasma or serum is derived from the same animal species that is the source of the anti-(human IgG) antibody. The preferred anti-(human IgG) antibody is goat anti-(human IgG) antibody. Thus, in the preferred format, the diluent would be goat serum or plasma. The optimal dilution factor for human plasma and serum is about 10-11 fold.

The conditions of incubation, e.g. pH and temperature, and the duration of incubation are not crucial. These parameters can be optimized by routine experimentation. Generally, the incubation will be run for 1-2 hours at about 45°C in a buffer of pH 7-8.

After incubation, the immunoabsorbent and the sample are separated. Separation can be accomplished by any conventional separation technique such as sedimentation or centrifugation. The immunoabsorbent then may be washed free of sample to eliminate any interfering substances.

The immunoabsorbent is incubated with the labeled anti-(human IgG) antibody (tracer) to detect human antibody bound thereto. Generally the immunoabsorbent is incubated with a solution of the labeled anti-(human IgG) antibody which contains a small amount (about 1%) of the serum or plasma of the animal species which serves as the source of the anti-(human IgG) antibody. Anti-(human IgG) antibody can be obtained from any animal source. However, goat anti-(human IgG) antibody is preferred. The anti-(human IgG) antibody can be an antibody against the Fc fragment of human IgG, for example, goat anti-(human IgG) Fc antibody.

The anti-(human IgG) antibody or anti-(human IgG)Fc can be labeled with a radioactive material such as ¹²⁵Iodine; labeled with an optical label, such as a fluorescent material; or labeled with an enzyme such as horseradish peroxidase. The anti-human antibody can also be biotinylated and labeled avidin used to detect its binding to the immunoabsorbent.

After incubation with the labeled antibody, the immunoabsorbent is separated from the solution and the label associated with the immunoabsorbent is evaluated. Depending upon the choice of label, the evaluation can be done in a variety of ways. The label may be detected by a gamma counter if the label is a radioactive gamma emitter, or by a fluorimeter, if the label is a fluorescent material. In the case of an enzyme label detection may be done colorimetrically employing a substrate for the enzyme.

The amount of label associated with the immunoabsorbent is compared with positive and negative controls in order to determine the presence of anti-HTLV-III antibody. The controls are generally run concomitantly with the sample to be tested. A positive control is a serum containing antibody against HTLV-III; a negative control is a serum from healthy individuals which do not contain antibody against HTLV-III.

For convenience and standardization, reagents for the performance of the immunometric assay can be assembled in assay kits. A kit for screening blood, for example, can include:

- a) an immunoabsorbent e.g. a polystyrene bead coated with HTLV-III polypeptide 121;
- b) a diluent for the serum or plasma sample, e.g. normal goat serum or plasma;
- c) an anti-(human IgG) antibody e.g. goat anti-(human IgG) antibody in buffered, aqueous solution containing about 1% goat serum or plasma;
- d) a positive control i.e. serum containing antibody against polypeptide 121; and
- e) a negative control e.g. pooled sera from healthy individuals which does not contain antibody against polypeptide 121.

If the label is an enzyme, an additional element of the kit can be the substrate for the enzyme.

Another type of assay for anti-HTLV-III antibody is an antigen sandwich assay. In this assay, labeled HTLV-III polypeptide 121 is used in place of anti-(human IgG) antibody to detect anti-HTLV-III antibody bound to the immunoabsorbent. The assay is based in principle on the bivalency of antibody molecules.

One binding site of the antibody binds the antigen affixed to the solid phase; the second is available for binding the labeled antigen. The assay procedure is essentially the same as described for the immunometric assay except that after incubation with the sample, the immunoadsorbent is incubated with a solution of labeled HTLV-III polypeptide 121. HTLV-III polypeptide can be labeled with radioisotope, an enzyme, etc. for this type of assay.

In a third format, the bacterial protein, Protein A, which binds the F_c segment of an IgG molecule without interfering with the antigen-antibody interaction can be used as the labeled tracer to detect anti-HTLV-antibody adsorbed to the immunoadsorbent. Protein A can be readily labeled with a radioisotope, enzyme or other detectable species.

Immunochemical assays employing the HTLV-III polypeptide 121 have several advantages over those employing a whole (or disrupted) virus. For one, assays based upon the polypeptide will alleviate the concern over growing large quantities of infectious virus and the inherent variability associated with cell culturing and virus production. Further, the assay will help mitigate the real or perceived fear of contracting AIDS by technicians in hospitals, clinics and blood banks who perform the test. As mentioned, reagents for assays based upon the whole virus (e.g. whole virus antigen immunoadsorbent), even though they are made with a disrupted, inactivated virus, present a risk of contamination with live virus. For example, a possible source of live virus contamination may be residual cell debris from the virus isolation process. Although extensive precautions can be taken to reduce the risk of contamination, it is virtually impossible to completely eliminate it. Significantly, the risk, though minimal, may be perceived as greater than it actually is by persons who handle the test reagents. Assay reagents without whole virus can help minimize this perception of risk. HTLV-III polypeptide 121 immunoassays provide a substitute for assays based on the whole virus which are at least comparable in sensitivity and specificity and superior in reproducibility.

As mentioned, HTLV-III polypeptide 121 is apparently derived from a viral envelope protein which is highly antigenic. Because of this, the polypeptide may be a useful vaccine against the virus. For this purpose, vaccine compositions can be made containing immunogenic amounts of purified polypeptide 121 in a suitable vehicle.

The invention is illustrated further by the following Exemplification.

Exemplification

I. Expression of HTLV III polypeptide 121.

HTLV-III DNA was excised from λ BH-10, a recombinant λ phage containing a 9 Kb segment of HTLV-III DNA inserted into the vector λ gtWES λ B. See B.H. Haha *et al.* *Nature* **312**, 166 (1984). The HTLV-III DNA was fragmented by sonication. DNA fragments of about 0.5 Kb in size were purified by gel electrophoresis. The purified fragments were end repaired, and cloned into the Sma I site of the open reading frame (ORF) plasmid vector, pMR100, developed by Gray, M.R. *et al.* *PNAS*, **79** 6598 (1982). pMR100 contains a bacterial *lac* promoter DNA segment linked to a second DNA fragment containing a hybrid coding sequence in which the N-terminus (5' segment) of the λ CI gene of bacteriophage lambda is fused to an N-terminal-deleted *lacI*Z gene (3' segment). A short linker DNA fragment, containing a Sma I cloning site, has been inserted between these two fragments in such a manner that a frame shift mutation has been introduced upstream of the *lacI*Z coding DNA. As a result, pMR100 does not produce any detectable beta-galactosidase activity when introduced into Lac⁻ host (*E. coli*) LG90 cells. The insertion of foreign DNA containing an open reading frame, in this case the HTLV-III DNA, at the Sma I cloning site can reverse the frame shift mutation if the inserted coding sequence is in the correct reading frame with respect to both the λ CI leader and the *lacI*Z gene. Transformants were screened on McConkey plates to detect individual clones that express beta-galactosidase enzymatic activity *in situ*. J. H. Miller, *Experiments in Molecular Genetics* (Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Cold Spring Harbor, New York, 1982).

Among 6000 ampicillin resistant *E. coli* LG90 transformants screened, about 300 were found to express beta-galactosidase activity. Colony hybridization using ³²P-labelled nick-translated HTLV-III DNA as a probe revealed that all these Lac⁺ clones contained HTLV-III DNA. In the Lac⁺ clones the HTLV-III fragment inserted into the Sma I site of pMR100 must contain no stop codons in the reading frame set by the λ CI leader segment and the *lacI*Z gene must also be in correct translational reading frame. The three-element-fused genes were expressed as tripartite fusion proteins, having a portion of the λ CI protein at the N-terminus, the HTLV-III segment in the middle, and the *lacI*Z polypeptide at the C-terminus.

The proteins produced by the Lac⁺ clones were analyzed by running cell lysates on 7.5% SDS-polyacrylamide gels along with those of the control Lac⁺ clone pMR200, which produced a λ CI-beta-galactosidase fusion protein. The *lacI*Z gene in pMR200 is identical to that in pMR100 except that it has a single base pair deletion which brings it in phase with the λ CI gene to produce an active beta-galactosidase. By virtue of the very large size of the beta-galactosidase and its fusion proteins, they were separated from the bulk of proteins in the cell lysates on the SDS-polyacrylamide gels and could be easily identified by Commassie blue staining as some of the Lac⁺ clones containing HTLV-III DNA produce polypeptides that are larger (15,000 to 27,000 daltons) than the λ CI-*lacI*Z fusion protein. These findings

are consistent with data that the DNA inserts are up to 700 bp long. The beta-galactosidase fusion proteins accounted for about 1-2% of total cellular protein.

The peptides produced by the Lac⁺ clones were examined by Western blot analysis [H. Towbin et al. PNAS USA, 76, 4350 (1979)] for immunoreactivity with sera from AIDS patients. After the lysates of Lac⁺ clones were electrophoresed in SDS-polyacrylamide gels, they were electro-transferred to nitro-cellulose filters. The protein blots were first reacted with AIDS patient sera and then with ¹²⁵I-labeled goat anti-human IgG. The recombinant peptides also reacted with anti-beta-galactosidase antiserum, consistent with the proposition that they had the general tripartite structure λCI-HTLV-III peptide-LacIZ. From the immunoreactivity pattern of the negative controls, pMR100 and pMR200, which did not contain any HTLV-III DNA insert, it is evident that the particular AIDS serum contained antibodies reactive with several bacterial proteins of the host *E. coli*. This is not surprising, since AIDS patients are usually infected with a number of bacteria. Absorbing AIDS patient sera with Sepharose 4B conjugated with *E. coli* extract reduced the background immunoreactivity to some extent but did not completely eliminate it.

About 300 independent HTLV-III DNA-containing Lac⁺ colonies were analyzed in SDS polyacrylamide gels using Commassie blue staining and Western blotting. About half of them were found to express fusion proteins containing extra peptides of about 100-200 amino acids, corresponding to HTLV-III DNA inserts of 300-600 bp long. Of these fusion proteins 20 were found to react specifically with AIDS patient sera. The unreactive clones probably contain peptides that fold in such a way that they are not reactive with antibodies or contain peptides derived from epitopes of HTLV-III protein molecules which are not immunogenic in AIDS patients. The other half of the Lac⁺ clones expressed fusion proteins whose sizes were not obviously different from that of the λCI-beta-galactosidase protein. None of this group of fusion proteins was found to react with sera of AIDS patients.

The HTLV-III DNA inserts from Lac⁺ ORF clones were mapped to specific segments in the HTLV-III genome using Southern blotting procedures. In these studies, each plasmid clone was labeled with ³²P nick-translation and hybridized to a battery of HTLV-III DNA restriction fragments. This hybridization analysis mapped all of the Lac⁺ ORF clones into four open reading frame segments designated ORF-A, ORF-B, ORF-C, and ORF-D consistent with the DNA sequencing data. The open reading frames ORF-A and -B, corresponding to the coding regions of the *gag* and *pol* gene, are 1.5 Kb and 3.0 Kb long, respectively. ORF-C is about 0.6 Kb long, which slightly overlaps with the ORF-B region and is capable of encoding a polypeptide of 21 Kd. The location of ORF-C and its overlap with the *pol* gene are reminiscent of the structure of the *env* gene in HTLV-I and -II viruses. However, ORF-C, designated as the short open reading frame (*sor*), is too short to code for the entire envelope protein. The fourth open reading frame, ORF-D, is 2.5 Kb long and could encode a large precursor of the major envelope glycoprotein and another protein derived from the 3' terminus which may be analogous to the *lor* product of HTLV-I and -II. This region has been designated as *env-lor* (17). The region is at least twice as long as the *lor* of HTLV-I and HTLV-II and it is unclear at the present time whether single or multiple proteins are encoded therein.

By southern blot analysis the 20 Lac⁺ ORF clones expressing immunoreactive fusion proteins were mapped into ORF-A, ORF-B, or ORF-D, but not into the *sor* region.

DNA sequencing analysis was also employed to locate the boundaries of HTLV-III inserts of several ORF clones. The results are summarized in Fig. 1B. Among these Lac⁺ clones which expressed immunoreactive peptides, ORF clones #113, 121, and 127 were particularly interesting because these DNA inserts were derived from the ORF-D, the *env-lor* region. Clone 121, which expressed a fusion protein reactive with all AIDS patient sera examined corresponded to a segment of the *env-lor* region from nucleotides 7259 to 7503 of the HTLV-III genome. The HTLV-III antigen expressed by this clone was selected for further study.

II. Purification and Characterization of HTLV III Polypeptide 121.

The low level of expression of the fusion peptide in the pMR100 vector (1.0% of total cellular protein) and its insolubility (probably due to the existence 23 half-cystine residues) made it difficult to purify sufficient quantity of the peptide for sera screening. To express peptide at higher levels in *E. coli*, the fragment was cloned into a high expression vector (Repligen, Cambridge, Mass.).

The recombinant pMR100 vector containing the HTLV-III insert was isolated from clone 121. The HTLV-III DNA was excised with a SmaI restriction endonuclease. The insert was separated by gel electrophoresis and identified by an HTLV-III DNA probe. The excised HTLV-III DNA was inserted in high expression vector (Repligen, Cambridge, MA), and *E. coli* LG90 cells were transformed with the recombinant vector and cultured to allow expression of the fusion protein. This fusion protein consists of 31 amino acid residues of the *E. coli*, 83 amino acid residues encoded by the segment of the *env-lor* region of HTLV-III and 13 amino acid residues encoded by nucleotides forming a multiple cloning site of the vector. (See above for amino acid sequence.) The fusion protein was purified by the following procedure.

A. Solubilization of AIDS Peptide

Cells transformed with the DNA vector harboring polypeptide 121 coding region were mechanically disrupted and lysed in Dyna-Mill™ homogenizer using an extraction buffer, 50 mM Tris HCl, pH 7.6, 5mM

EDTA and 0.1 mM phenyl methyl sulphonyl fluoride. Cell lysates were centrifuged at 12,000xg for 5 minutes at 4° C. SDS-polyacrylamide gel analysis revealed that the resulting pellet contains all the HTLV-III polypeptide 121 at about 20% purity. Since supernatant contains about 90% of total cell protein, the expression of polypeptide 121 appears to be at level of 5% of total protein. To solubilize the polypeptide 121 from the pellet, extreme denaturing conditions (8 M urea or 6 M guanidine HCl) were necessary. The pellets were suspended in 10 volumes of extraction buffer containing 8 M urea and homogenized using a POLYTRON™ homogenizer. The homogenized suspension was stirred for 1 h at room temperature and centrifuged at 20 k for overnight at 14° C. The resulting supernatant was used for further purification.

B. Ion-Exchange Chromatography

Since the polypeptide 121 contains 6 half cystine residues, it was anticipated that intermolecular disulfide bridges might be formed not only between polypeptide 121 but also between polypeptide 121 and E. coli protein containing half-cystines. To minimize formation of disulfide bridges, the reducing agent dithiothreitol (DTT) was included in buffers used in the ion-exchange chromatography.

The urea extract of cell lysate pellet solution (16.5 ml) in 8 M urea was adjusted to pH 8.0 with 5 M NaOH and incubated with 30 mg of DTT for 1 h at 45° C. to reduce all possible disulfide bridges. This solution was applied on to a DEAE-Sephacrose-Fast Flow™ column (1.6 x 17 cm) equilibrated with the buffer containing 50 mM Tris HCl, pH 8.5, 10 mM DTT and 8 M urea. Polypeptide 121 was eluted isocratically in the third peak monitored by UV absorbency at 280 nm. The peptide was more than 98% pure as judged by SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis.

This chromatographically purified AIDS peptide remained in solution after exhaustive dialysis against 50 mM Tris HCl buffer at pH 8.5 without 8 M urea.

C. Gel Filtration Chromatography

Using the same reducing and denaturing conditions, the pellet solution in 8 M urea was also applied to a gel filtration column, Sephacryl™ S-200. 5 ml of partially purified polypeptide 121 in buffer containing 50 mM Tris HCl, pH 8.5, 10 mM DTT in 8 M urea was incubated at 45°C for 30 minutes and applied on a column of Sephacryl™ S-200 (2.6 x 35 cm) equilibrated in the same buffer. This process removed contaminants of higher molecular weight than the recombinant polypeptide 121 but not the lower molecular weight contaminants thereby producing about 85% pure peptide.

Immune Reactivity to AIDS Sera

In Western blotting analysis employing peptide 121 on nitrocellulose strips and the pooled sera from AIDS patients as the source of antibodies only a single band was observed. ¹²⁵I-goat anti human IgG Fc was used as the tracer to indicate the presence and amount of human antibodies specific for the viral antigens. The pooled sera contained antibodies against all major bands of viral components including P41 (segment of HTLV-III envelop protein) and P24 (an HTLV-III core protein) as indicated by Western blot analysis. Even though some patients' sera showed barely detectable P41 or any other bands in Western blot analysis with inactivated HTLV-III as the antigen, they produced strong bands with polypeptide 121 as the antigen.

HTLV-III peptide 121 was evaluated as an immunoabsorbent on plastic solid phase for immunoassays to quantitate anti-HTLV-III antibodies in patient sera and to compare the recombinant viral antigen with inactivated HTLV-III as solid phase immunoabsorbents. HTLV-III peptide 121 at 2 mg/ml in Tris. HCl (0.05M, pH 8.0) was pipetted into PVC microtiter plate, 100 microliters per well. Purified HTLV-III preparation at 2 mg/ml was added NP-40 at final concentration of 0.5% and then heated at 56°C for 30 min. It was diluted with bicarbonate buffer (0.1M, pH 9.6) to 4000 fold and then pipetted into wells, 100 microliters per well, of PVC microtiter plate. After incubation at 4°C for 16 hours, the antigen solutions were removed, and the wells were washed three times with phosphate buffered saline (PBS). The wells were "post-coated" with 3% liquid gelatin in PBS for 2 hours and washed three times with PBS. 190 microliters of dilutant PBS buffer containing 20% goat serum and 1% gelatin was pipetted into each normal well and 10 microliters of serum samples were pipetted into the wells (1:20 dilution of serum). After 2 hours incubation at room temperature, the samples were removed and wells washed with PBS three times. 100,000 cpm of goat anti-human IgG Fc antibodies in 100 microliters were added into each well and the plates were incubated further for 1 h. After the plates were washed with water 3 times, the plates were dried and wells were cut and counted for ¹²⁵I in a "Y" scintillation counter. As shown in Figure 1, with the pooled AIDS patient sera as the positive serum sample and pooled sera from normal healthy individuals as the negative control, the immunoassay detected positive signal at serum dilutions down to 300,000 fold. Even though the pooled positive sera contained more antibodies against P24 than against P41 as revealed by Western blot analysis, the signal to background ratio exhibited with polypeptide 121 was larger than that with inactivated virus (Figure 1).

These results suggest that even though the immunoabsorbent employing purified recombinant HTLV-III peptide may absorb only a specific fraction of the antibodies against HTLV-III in sera of AIDS pa-

tients, it probably provides the capability to absorb all or most of the antibodies specific for the particular peptide antigen. The immunoabsorbent with the disrupted virus probably can absorb antibodies reactive with most virion proteins, but probably due to the steric hindrance of dominant antigenic determinants, the loss of antigenicity during virus purification or the insufficiency of certain viral components on the solid phase, it can absorb only a portion of the antibodies. In addition, because the recombinant peptide is more defined than disrupted virus, better homogeneity and less variability can be achieved, giving rise to less background immunoreactivity in the immunoassays.

Having characterized the basic parameters of the immunoradiometric assay with the recombinant peptide 121, panels of serum samples from patients with AIDS or ARC, from other high risk individuals, and from healthy normal controls were analyzed. As shown in Table 1 and Figure 2, the assay detected 120 of 121 patients with AIDS or ARC. Among the clinically healthy individuals who were either homosexual males or who had sexual contact with AIDS patients, the immunoassay detected all of those who had been shown to be positive by Western blot analysis. In fact, many of AIDS and ARC sera, which demonstrated undetectable or marginal reactivity in Western blot analysis, were clearly positive in the immunoassay. The only one AIDS serum missed by the immunoassay did not show immunoreactive band in Western blot analysis. Among 92 sera of normal healthy controls, only one was slightly above background level. This particular serum did not show an immunoreactive band by Western blot analysis.

Table 1. Results of sera tested with an immunoassay employing a recombinant HTLV-III antigen peptide.

Serum from	Total number tested	Western blot positive with HTLV-III virus	Immunoassay positive
Patients with AIDS	121	116 ⁽¹⁾	120
Individuals with sexual contact with AIDS patients	6	4	4
Healthy homosexual	13	3	3
Normal plasma donors	92	(2)	1

(1) Two of the five negatives by Western blot analysis show very weak bands.

(2) Thirty five normals were analyzed by Western blot analysis and were all negative.

In summary, the present studies have demonstrated that solid-phase immunoassays employing a peptide encoded by a gene segment in the env-for region of HTLV-III and produced by genetic engineering method can be used to detect anti-HTLV-III antibodies in 99% of sera of patients with AIDS or ARC, or of individuals infected with HTLV-III. The immunometric assay is a quantitative one that can measure antibody over a very broad range. Because very defined, consistently homogeneous peptide can be produced in large quantities, the production of immunoassays with a peptide such as described herein offer certain advantages over the production of immunoassays with the inactivated, disrupted virus.

Claims for the Contracting States: DE, GB, FR, CH, LI, NL, SE, BE, LU, IT

1. HTLV-III polypeptide 121 of the formula:
 Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
 Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
 Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
 Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
 Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
 Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
 Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
 Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
 Thr Ser Leu
 and modifications of said polypeptide 121 in which amino acids have been deleted, inserted or substituted without essentially detracting from the immunological properties thereof.
2. A fusion protein containing the HTLV-III polypeptide 121 according to claim 1.
3. A segment of HTLV-III DNA encoding HTLV-III polypeptide 121 according to claim 1; and modifications of said segment in which nucleotides have been deleted, inserted or substituted without essentially detracting from the immunological properties of the encoded polypeptide.
4. A fusion protein of claim 2, having the amino acid sequence:
 Leu Arg Pro Val Glu Thr Pro Thr Arg Glu
 Ile Lys Lys Leu Asp Gly Leu Trp Ala Phe
 Ser Leu Asp Arg Glu Asn Cys Gly Ile Asp
 Gln Ala Ser Ala Val Asp Ala Cys Gly Ser
 Pro
 Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
 Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
 Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
 Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
 Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
 Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
 Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
 Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
 Thr Ser Leu
 Trp Gly Ser Gly Thr Arg Glu Leu Glu Phe
 Leu Lys Thr Lys Gly Pro Arg Asp Thr Pro
 Ile Phe Ile Gly.
 and modifications of said fusion protein in which amino acids have been deleted, inserted or substituted without essentially detracting from the immunological properties thereof.
5. A HTLV-III DNA segment of claim 3, having the nucleotide sequence:
 ATT GAG GCG CAA CAG CAT CTG TTG CAA CTC ACA GTC
 TGG GGC ATC AAG CAG CTC CAG GCA AGA ATC CTG GCT
 GTG GAA AGA TAC CTA AAG GAT CAA CAG CTC CTG GGG
 ATT TGG GGT TGC TCT GGA AAA CTC ATT TGC ACC ACT
 GCT GTG CCT TGG AAT GCT ACT TGG AGT AAT AAA TCT
 CTG GAA CAG ATT TGG AAT AAC ATG ACC TGG ATG GAG
 TGG GAC AGA GAA ATT AAC AAT TAC ACA AGC TTA
 or equivalent codons.
6. An expression vector in which the DNA segment of claim 3 or claim 5 is inserted, or a cell transformed with said expression vector.
7. An immunochemical assay for detecting or quantifying antibody against HTLV-III in a fluid employing an HTLV-III-based material according to claim 1.
8. A method of detecting antibody against HTLV-III in a biological fluid, comprising the steps of:
 a) incubating an immunoabsorbent comprising a solid phase to which is attached an HTLV-III-based material according to claim 1, with a sample of the biological fluid to be tested, under conditions which allow the anti-HTLV-III antibody in the sample to bind to the immunoabsorbent;
 b) separating the immunoabsorbent from the sample; and
 c) determining if antibody has bound to the immunoabsorbent as an indication of anti-HTLV-III in the sample.
9. A method of claim 8, wherein the step of determining if antibody has bound to the immunoabsorbent comprises:
 a) incubating the immunoabsorbent with a labeled antibody against antibody of the species from which the biological fluid is derived; thereafter separating the immunoabsorbent from the labeled antibody after the incubation period; and detecting the label associated with the immunoabsorbent; or
 b) incubating the immunoabsorbent with labeled HTLV-III-based material; separating the immunoabsorbent

sorbent from the labeled HTLV-III-based material; and detecting the label associated with the immuno-adsorbent; or

c) incubating the immuno-adsorbent with labeled Protein A; separating the immuno-adsorbent from the labeled Protein A; and detecting the label associated with the immuno-adsorbent.

5 10. A method of detecting antibody against HTLV-III in a human serum or plasma sample, comprising the steps of:

a) providing an immuno-adsorbent comprising a bead coated with an HTLV-III-based material according to claim 1, and the immuno-adsorbent for example further comprising a post-coat of animal protein;

10 b) incubating the immuno-adsorbent with the serum or plasma sample under conditions which allow anti-HTLV-III antibody in the sample to bind the immuno-adsorbent;

c) separating the immuno-adsorbent and the sample;

d) incubating the immuno-adsorbent with a labeled anti-(human IgG) antibody under conditions which allow the anti-(human IgG) antibody to bind human anti-HTLV-III antibody bound to the immuno-adsorbent;

15 e) separating the immuno-adsorbent from the unbound anti-(human IgG) antibody; and

f) evaluating the label associated with the immuno-adsorbent as an indication of the presence of antibody against HTLV-III in the sample.

11. A method of claim 10, wherein the labeled anti-(human IgG) antibody is an animal (e.g. goat) antibody and the serum or plasma sample is diluted with normal serum of an animal (e.g. goat) of the same species.

12. A method of claim 10 or claim 11, wherein the anti-(human IgG) antibody is labeled with a radioisotope, an enzyme or a fluorescent compound.

13. An immuno-adsorbent for use in a solid phase immunochemical assay for antibody against HTLV-III, comprising a solid phase (e.g. a glass or plastic bead, a well of a microtiter plate or a test tube) to which is affixed an HTLV-III-based material according to claim 1 and the immuno-adsorbent for example further comprising a post-coat of animal protein.

14. A vaccine composition comprising an immunogenic amount of an HTLV-III-based material according to claim 1 in a pharmacologically acceptable vehicle.

Claims for the Contracting State: AT

1. A method of producing e.g. by recombinant DNA techniques or by chemical synthesis HTLV-III polypeptide 121 of the formula:

Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln

Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala

35 Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys

Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys

Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val

Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser

Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp

40 Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr

Thr Ser Leu

and modifications of said polypeptide 121 in which amino acids have been deleted, inserted or substituted without essentially detracting from the immunological properties thereof.

2. A method of producing a fusion protein containing the HTLV-III polypeptide 121 as defined in claim 1.

3. A method of producing a segment of HTLV-III DNA encoding HTLV-III polypeptide 121 as defined in claim 1; and modifications of said segment in which nucleotides have been deleted, inserted or substituted without essentially detracting from the immunological properties of the encoded polypeptide.

4. A method of producing a fusion protein as defined in claim 2, having the amino acid sequence:

Leu Arg Pro Val Glu Thr Pro Thr Arg Glu

50 Ile Lys Lys Leu Asp Gly Leu Trp Ala Phe

Ser Leu Asp Arg Glu Asn Cys Gly Ile Asp

Gln Ala Ser Ala Val Asp Ala Cys Gly Ser

Pro

Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln

55 Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala

Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys

Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys

Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val

Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser

60 Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp

Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr

Thr Ser Leu

Trp Gly Ser Gly Thr Arg Glu Leu Glu Phe

65 Leu Lys Thr Lys Gly Pro Arg Asp Thr Pro

Ile Phe Ile Gly

and modifications of said fusion protein in which amino acids have been deleted, inserted or substituted without essentially detracting from the immunological properties thereof.

5. A method of claim 3, wherein the HTLV-III DNA segment has the nucleotide sequence:

ATT GAG GCG CAA CAG CAT CTG TTG CAA CTC ACA GTC
 TGG GGC ATC AAG CAG CTG CAG GCA AGA ATC CTG GCT
 GTG GAA AGA TAC CTA AAG GAT CAA CAG CTC CTG GGG
 ATT TGG GGT TGC TCT GGA AAA CTC ATT TGC ACC ACT
 GCT GTG CCT TGG AAT GCT ACT TGG AGT AAT AAA TCT
 CTG GAA CAG ATT TGG AAT AAC ATG ACC TGG ATG GAG
 TGG GAC AGA GAA ATT AAC AAT TAC ACA AGC TTA

or equivalent codons.

6. A method of producing (a) an expression vector in which the DNA segment as defined in claim 3 or claim 5 is inserted, or (b) a cell transformed with said expression vector.

7. An immunochemical assay for detecting or quantifying antibody against HTLV-III in a fluid employing an HTLV-III-based material as defined in claim 1.

8. A method of detecting antibody against HTLV-III in a biological fluid, comprising the steps of:

a) incubating an immunoadsorbent comprising a solid phase to which is attached an HTLV-III-based material as defined in claim 1, with a sample of the biological fluid to be tested, under conditions which allow the anti-HTLV-III antibody in the sample to bind to the immunoadsorbent;

b) separating the immunoadsorbent from the sample; and

c) determining if antibody has bound to the immunoadsorbent as an indication of anti-HTLV-III in the sample.

9. A method of claim 8, wherein the step of determining if antibody has bound to the immunoadsorbent comprises:

a) incubating the immunoadsorbent with a labeled antibody against antibody of the species from which the biological fluid is derived; thereafter separating the immunoadsorbent from the labeled antibody after the incubation period; and detecting the label associated with the immunoadsorbent; or

b) incubating the immunoadsorbent with labeled HTLV-III-based material; separating the immunoadsorbent from the labeled HTLV-III-based material; and detecting the label associated with the immunoadsorbent; or

c) incubating the immunoadsorbent with labeled Protein A; separating the immunoadsorbent from the labeled Protein A; and detecting the label associated with the immunoadsorbent.

10. A method of detecting antibody against HTLV-III in a human serum or plasma sample, comprising the steps of:

a) providing an immunoadsorbent comprising a bead coated with an HTLV-III-based material as defined in claim 1, and the immunoadsorbent for example further comprising a post-coat of animal protein;

b) incubating the immunoadsorbent with the serum or plasma sample under conditions which allow anti-HTLV-III antibody in the sample to bind to the immunoadsorbent;

c) separating the immunoadsorbent and the sample;

d) incubating the immunoadsorbent with a labeled anti-(human IgG) antibody under conditions which allow the anti-(human IgG) antibody to bind to human anti-HTLV-III antibody bound to the immunoadsorbent;

e) separating the immunoadsorbent from the unbound anti-(human IgG) antibody; and

f) evaluating the label associated with the immunoadsorbent as an indication of the presence of antibody against HTLV-III in the sample.

11. A method of claim 10, wherein the labeled anti-(human IgG) antibody is an animal (e.g. goat) antibody and the serum or plasma sample is diluted with normal serum of an animal (e.g. goat) of the same species.

12. A method of claim 10 or claim 11, wherein the anti-(human IgG) antibody is labeled with a radioisotope, an enzyme or a fluorescent compound.

13. A method of producing an immunoadsorbent for use in a solid phase immunochemical assay for antibody against HTLV-III, comprising a solid phase (e.g. a glass or plastic bead, a well of a microtiter plate or a test tube) to which is affixed an HTLV-III-based material as defined in claim 1 and the immunoadsorbent for example further comprising a post-coat of animal protein.

14. A method of producing a vaccine composition comprising an immunogenic amount of an HTLV-III-based material as defined in claim 1 in a pharmacologically acceptable vehicle.

Patentansprüche für die Vertragsstaaten: DE, GB, FR, CH, LI, NL, SE, BE, LU, IT

1. HTLV-III-Polypeptid 121 mit der Formel:

Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
 Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
 Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
 Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
 Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
 Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser

Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn M t Thr Trp
Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
Thr Ser Leu

5 und Modifikationen dieses Polypeptids 121, in denen Aminosäuren ohne wesentlichen Abzug von den immunologischen Eigenschaften gelöscht, eingefügt oder ersetzt worden sind.

2. Schmelzprotein, das das HTLV-III-Polypeptid 121 nach Anspruch 1 enthält.

3. Segment der HTLV-III-DNA mit codiertem HTLV-III-Polypeptid 121 nach Anspruch 1, und Modifikationen dieses Segmentes, in denen Nukleotiden ohne wesentlichen Abzug von den immunologischen Eigenschaften des codierten Polypeptids gelöscht, eingefügt oder ersetzt worden sind.

10 4. Schmelzprotein nach Anspruch 2 mit der Aminosäuresequenz

Leu Arg Pro Val Glu Thr Pro Thr Arg Glu
Ile Lys Lys Leu Asp Gly Leu Trp Ala Phe
Ser Leu Asp Arg Glu Asn Cys Gly Ile Asp
Gln Ala Ser Ala Val Asp Ala Cys Gly Ser
Pro

15

Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
Thr Ser Leu

25

Trp Gly Ser Gly Thr Arg Glu Leu Glu Phe
Leu Lys Thr Lys Gly Pro Arg Asp Thr Pro
Ile Phe Ile Gly

und Modifikationen dieses Schmelzproteins, in denen Aminosäuren ohne wesentlichen Abzug von den immunologischen Eigenschaften gelöscht, eingefügt oder ersetzt worden sind.

30 5. HTLV-III-DNA-Segment nach Anspruch 3 mit der Nukleotidensequenz

ATT GAG GCG CAG CAT CTG TTG CAA CTC ACA GCT
TGG GGC ATC AAG CAG CTC CAG GCA AGA ATC CTG GCT
GTG GAA AGA TAC CTA AAG GAT CAA CAG CTC CTG GGG
ATT TGG GGT TGC TCT GGA AAA CTC ATT TGC ACC ACT
GCT GTG CCT TGG AAT GCT ACT TGG AGT AAT AAA TCT
35 CTG GAA CAG ATT TGG AAT AAC ATG ACC TGG ATG GAG
TGG GAC AGA GAA ATT AAC AAT TAC ACA AGC TTA

oder äquivalenten Codonen.

6. Expressionsvektor, in den das DNA-Segment nach Anspruch 3 oder Anspruch 5 eingesetzt ist, oder eine mit diesem Expressionsvektor umgebildete Zelle.

40 7. Immunochemischer Versuch zur Feststellung oder quantitativen Bestimmung von Antikörpern gegen HTLV-III in einem ein Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III nach Anspruch 1 verwendenden Medium.

8. Verfahren zur Feststellung von Antikörpern gegen HTLV-III in einem biologischen Medium, mit den Schritten, daß

45 a) ein Immunoadsorbens mit einer festen Phase, an der ein Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III nach Anspruch 1 angelegt ist, mit einer Probe des zu untersuchenden biologischen Mediums unter Bedingungen geimpft wird, die es dem Anti-HTLV-III-Antikörper in der Probe erlauben, sich mit dem Immuno-

adsorbens zu verbinden,

50 b) das Immunoadsorbens von der Probe getrennt wird und

c) festgestellt wird, ob sich der Antikörper mit dem Immunoadsorbens als eine Anzeige vom Anti-

HTLV-III in der Probe verbunden hat.

9. Verfahren nach Anspruch 8, bei dem der Schritt der Feststellung, ob sich ein Antikörper mit dem Immunoadsorbens verbunden hat, darin besteht, daß

55 a) das Immunoadsorbens mit einem etikettierten Antikörper gegen Antikörper der Spezies, aus der das biologische Medium abgenommen wird, geimpft wird, danach das Immunoadsorbens von dem etikettierten Antikörper nach der Inkubationsperiode getrennt und das mit dem Immunoadsorbens assoziierte Etikett festgestellt wird oder

b) das Immunoadsorbens mit etikettiertem Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III geimpft, das Immuno-

60

adsorbens von dem etikettierten Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III getrennt und das mit dem Immuno-

adsorbens assoziierte Etikett festgestellt wird oder

c) das Immunoadsorbens mit etikettiertem Protein A geimpft, das Immunoadsorbens von dem etikettier-

ten Protein A getrennt und das mit dem Immunoadsorbens assoziierte Etikett festgestellt wird.

65

10. Verfahren zur Feststellung eines Antikörpers gegen HTLV-III in einer Humanserum- oder -plas-

ma, bestehend aus den Schritten, daß

a) in Immunoadsorbens aus einem mit einem Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III nach Anspruch 1 be-

schichteten Kügelchen bereitgestellt wird und das Immunoabsorbens zum Beispiel des weiteren eine Nachbeschichtung aus tierischem Protein umfaßt,

b) das Immunoabsorbens mit der Serum- oder Plasmaprobe unter Bedingungen geimpft wird, die es einem Anti-HTLV-III-Antikörper in der Probe erlauben, sich mit dem Immunoabsorbens zu verbinden,

c) das Immunoabsorbens und die Probe getrennt werden,

d) das Immunoabsorbens mit einem etikettierten Anti-(Human-IgG)-Antikörper unter Bedingungen geimpft wird, die es dem Anti-(Human-IgG)-Antikörper erlauben, sich mit dem an das Immunoabsorbens gebundenen Human-Anti-HTLV-III-Antikörper zu verbinden,

e) das Immunoabsorbens von dem ungebundenen Anti-(Human-IgG)-Antikörper getrennt wird und

f) das mit dem Immunoabsorbens assoziierte Etikett als eine Anzeige des Vorhandenseins von Antikörpern gegen HTLV-III in der Probe gewertet wird.

11. Verfahren nach Anspruch 10, bei dem der etikettierte Anti-(Human-IgG)-Antikörper ein tierischer Antikörper (z.B. Ziege) ist und die Serum- oder Plasmaprobe mit normalem Serum eines Tieres (z.B. Ziege) der gleichen Spezies verdünnt wird.

12. Verfahren nach Anspruch 10 oder Anspruch 11, bei dem der Anti-(Human-IgG)-Antikörper mit einem Radioisotop, einem Enzym oder einer fluoreszierenden Verbindung etikettiert wird.

13. Immunoabsorbens zur Verwendung in einem immunochemischen Versuch mit einer festen Phase für Antikörper gegen HTLV-III, bestehend aus einer festen Phase (z.B. einem Glas- oder Kunststoffkügelchen, einer Vertiefung einer Mikrotiterplatte oder einem Testrohr), an der ein Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III nach Anspruch 1 fixiert ist, wobei das Immunoabsorbens zum Beispiel ferner eine Nachbeschichtung aus tierischem Protein umfaßt.

14. Impfstoff-Zusammensetzung, bestehend aus einer immunisierenden Menge eines Materials auf der Basis von HTLV-III nach Anspruch 1 in einem pharmakologisch akzeptablen Träger.

25 Patentansprüche für den Vertragsstaat: AT

1. Verfahren zum Herstellen z.B. durch rekombinante DNA-Techniken oder durch chemische Synthese von HTLV-III-Polypeptid 121 mit der Formel:

Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
Thr Ser Leu

und Modifikationen dieses Polypeptids 121, in denen Aminosäuren ohne wesentlichen Abzug von den immunologischen Eigenschaften gelöscht, eingefügt oder ersetzt worden sind.

2. Verfahren zum Herstellen eines Schmelzproteins, das das HTLV-III-Polypeptid 121 nach Anspruch 1 enthält.

3. Verfahren zum Herstellen eines Segments der HTLV-III-DNA mit codiertem HTLV-III-Polypeptid 121 nach Anspruch 1, und von Modifikationen dieses Segmentes, in denen Nukleotide ohne wesentlichen Abzug von den immunologischen Eigenschaften des codierten Polypeptids gelöscht, eingefügt oder ersetzt worden sind.

4. Verfahren zum Herstellen eines Schmelzproteins nach Anspruch 2 mit der Aminosäuresequenz

Leu Arg Pro Val Glu Thr Pro Thr Arg Glu
Ile Lys Lys Leu Asp Gly Leu Trp Ala Phe
Ser Leu Asp Arg Glu Asn Cys Gly Ile Asp
Gln Ala Ser Ala Val Asp Ala Cys Gly Ser
Pro
Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
Thr Ser Leu
Trp Gly Ser Gly Thr Arg Glu Leu Glu Phe
Leu Lys Thr Lys Gly Pro Arg Asp Thr Pro
Ile Phe Ile Gly

und von Modifikationen dieses Schmelzproteins, in denen Aminosäuren ohne wesentlichen Abzug von den immunologischen Eigenschaften gelöscht, eingefügt oder ersetzt worden sind.

5. Verfahren nach Anspruch 3, wobei das HTLV-III-DNA-Segment die Nukleotidensequenz besitzt:
ATT GAG GCG CAG CAT CTG TTG CAA CTC ACA GCT
TGG GGC ATC AAG CAG CTC CAG GCA AGA ATC CTG GCT
GTG GAA AGA TAC CTA AAG GAT CAA CAG CTC CTG GGG
ATT TGG GGT TGC TCT GGA AAA CTC ATT TGC ACC ACT
GCT GTG CCT TGG AAT GCT ACT TGG AGT AAT AAA TCT
CTG GAA CAG ATT TGG AAT AAC ATG ACC TGG ATG GAG
TGG GAC AGA GAA ATT AAC AAT TAC ACA AGC TTA
oder äquivalente Codonen.
6. Verfahren zum Herstellen a) eines Expressionsvektors, in den das DNA-Segment nach Anspruch 3 oder Anspruch 5 eingesetzt ist, oder b) einer mit diesem Expressionsvektor umgebildeten Zelle.
7. Immunochemischer Versuch zur Feststellung oder quantitativen Bestimmung von Antikörpern gegen HTLV-III in einem ein Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III nach Anspruch 1 verwendenden Medium.
8. Verfahren zur Feststellung von Antikörpern gegen HTLV-III in einem biologischen Medium, mit den Schritten, daß
- a) ein Immunoabsorbens mit einer festen Phase, an der ein Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III nach Anspruch 1 angelegt ist, mit einer Probe des zu untersuchenden biologischen Mediums unter Bedingungen geimpft wird, die es dem Anti-HTLV-III-Antikörper in der Probe erlauben, sich mit dem Immunoabsorbens zu verbinden,
- b) das Immunoabsorbens von der Probe getrennt wird und
- c) festgestellt wird, ob sich der Antikörper mit dem Immunoabsorbens als eine Anzeige vom Anti-HTLV-III in der Probe verbunden hat.
9. Verfahren nach Anspruch 8, bei dem der Schritt der Feststellung, ob sich ein Antikörper mit dem Immunoabsorbens verbunden hat, darin besteht, daß
- a) das Immunoabsorbens mit einem etikettierten Antikörper gegen Antikörper der Spezies, aus der das biologische Medium abgenommen wird, geimpft wird, danach das Immunoabsorbens von dem etikettierten Antikörper nach der Inkubationsperiode getrennt und das mit dem Immunoabsorbens assoziierte Etikett festgestellt wird oder
- b) das Immunoabsorbens mit etikettiertem Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III geimpft, das Immunoabsorbens von dem etikettierten Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III getrennt und das mit dem Immunoabsorbens assoziierte Etikett festgestellt wird oder
- c) das Immunoabsorbens mit etikettiertem Protein A geimpft, das Immunoabsorbens von dem etikettierten Protein A getrennt und das mit dem Immunoabsorbens assoziierte Etikett festgestellt wird.
10. Verfahren zur Feststellung eines Antikörpers gegen HTLV-III in einer Humanserum- oder -plasma probe, bestehend aus den Schritten, daß
- a) ein Immunoabsorbens aus einem mit einem Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III nach Anspruch 1 beschichteten Kügelchen bereitgestellt wird und das Immunoabsorbens zum Beispiel des weiteren eine Nachbeschichtung aus tierischem Protein umfaßt,
- b) das Immunoabsorbens mit der Serum- oder Plasma probe unter Bedingungen geimpft wird, die es einem Anti-HTLV-III-Antikörper in der Probe erlauben, sich mit dem Immunoabsorbens zu verbinden,
- c) das Immunoabsorbens und die Probe getrennt werden,
- d) das Immunoabsorbens mit einem etikettierten Anti-(Human-IgG)-Antikörper unter Bedingungen geimpft wird, die es dem Anti-(Human-IgG)-Antikörper erlauben, sich mit dem an das Immunoabsorbens gebundenen Human-Anti-HTLV-III-Antikörper zu verbinden,
- e) das Immunoabsorbens von dem ungebundenen Anti-(Human-IgG)-Antikörper getrennt wird und
- f) das mit dem Immunoabsorbens assoziierte Etikett als eine Anzeige des Vorhandenseins von Antikörpern gegen HTLV-III in der Probe gewertet wird.
11. Verfahren nach Anspruch 10, bei dem der etikettierte Anti-(Human-IgG)-Antikörper ein tierischer Antikörper (z.B. Ziege) ist und die Serum- oder Plasma probe mit normalem Serum eines Tieres (z.B. Ziege) der gleichen Spezies verdünnt wird.
12. Verfahren nach Anspruch 10 oder Anspruch 11, bei dem der Anti-(Human-IgG)-Antikörper mit einem Radioisotop, einem Enzym oder einer fluoreszierenden Verbindung etikettiert wird.
13. Verfahren zum Herstellen eines Immunoabsorbens zur Verwendung in einem immunochemischen Versuch mit einer festen Phase für Antikörper gegen HTLV-III, bestehend aus einer festen Phase (z.B. einem Glas- oder Kunststoffkügelchen, einer Vertiefung einer Mikrotiterplatte oder einem Testrohr), an der ein Material auf der Basis von HTLV-III nach Anspruch 1 fixiert ist, wobei das Immunoabsorbens zum Beispiel ferner eine Nachbeschichtung aus tierischem Protein umfaßt.
14. Verfahren zum Herstellen einer Impfstoff-Zusammensetzung, bestehend aus einer immunisierenden Menge eines Materials auf der Basis von HTLV-III nach Anspruch 1 in einem pharmakologisch akzeptablen Träger.

Revendications pour les états contractants: DE, GB, FR, CH, LI, NL, SE, BE, LU, IT

1. Polypeptide 121 antigénique du virus lymphotrope de cellule humaine T de type III (VLHT-III), (ou selon la terminologie anglaise, HTLV-III polypeptide 121) de formule

- Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
 Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
 Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
 Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
 5 Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
 Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
 Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
 Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
 Thr Ser Leu
- 10 et ses formes modifiées, caractérisé par le fait que des acides aminés ont été supprimés, insérés ou substitués sans diminuer de façon essentielle leurs propriétés immunologiques.
2. Protéine fusionnée caractérisée par le fait qu'elle contient le polypeptide 121 VLHT-III selon la revendication 1.
3. Segment d'acide désoxyribonucléique VLHT-III caractérisé par le fait qu'il inclut du polypeptide 121
- 15 VLHT-III selon la revendication 1 et formes modifiées dudit segment, dans lequel des nucléotides ont été supprimés, insérés ou substitués sans diminuer de façon essentielle les propriétés immunologiques du polypeptide inclus.
4. Protéine fusionnée selon la revendication 2 caractérisée par le fait qu'elle présente la séquence suivante d'acides aminés:
- 20 Leu Arg Pro Val Glu Thr Pro Thr Arg Glu
 Ile Lys Lys Leu Asp Gly Leu Trp Ala Phe
 Ser Leu Asp Arg Glu Asn Cys Gly Ile Asp
 Gln Ala Ser Ala Val Asp Ala Cys Gly Ser
 Pro
- 25 Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
 Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
 Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
 Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
 Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
- 30 Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
 Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
 Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
 Thr Ser Leu
 Trp Gly Ser Gly Thr Arg Glu Leu Glu Phe
- 35 Leu Lys Thr Lys Gly Pro Arg Asp Thr Pro
 Ile Phe Ile Gly
- et formes modifiées de ladite protéine dans lesquelles des acides aminés ont été supprimés, insérés ou substitués sans diminuer de façon essentielle leurs propriétés immunologiques.
5. Segment d'acide désoxyribonucléique VLHT-III selon la revendication 3 caractérisé par le fait qu'il
- 40 présente la séquence de nucléotides:
 ATT TGG GGT TGC TCT GGA AAA CTC ATT TGC ACC ACT
 GCT GTG CCT TGG AAT GCT ACT TGG AGT AAT AAA TCT
 CTG GAA CAG ATT TGG AAT AAC ATG ACC TGG ATG GAG
 TGG GAC AGA GAA ATT AAC AAT TAC ACA AGC TTA
 45 ATT GAG GCG CAA CAG CAT CTG TTG CAA CTC ACA GTC
 TGG GGC ATC AAG CAG CTC CAG GCA AGA ATC CTG GCT
 GTG GAA AGA TAC CTA AAG GAT CAA CAG CTC CTG GGG
- ou codons équivalents.
6. Vecteur d'expression caractérisé par le fait que le segment d'acide désoxyribonucléique selon l'une
- 50 des revendications 3 ou 5 est inséré, ou cellule transformée par ledit vecteur d'expression.
7. Essai immunochimique pour détecter et quantifier dans un fluide des anticorps contre le VLHT-III, caractérisé par le fait qu'il utilise un matériau à base VLHT-III selon la revendication 1.
8. Procédé de détection d'anticorps contre le VLHT-III dans un fluide biologique caractérisé par le fait qu'il comprend les étapes suivantes:
- 55 a) incubation d'un immunoabsorbant comprenant une phase solide à laquelle est attaché un matériau de base VLHT-III selon la revendication 1, avec un échantillon du fluide biologique à étudier, dans des conditions qui permettent à l'anticorps anti VLHT-III de l'échantillon de se lier à l'immunoabsorbant;
- b) séparation de l'immunoabsorbant de l'échantillon et
- 60 c) détermination de l'existence possible d'une liaison d'anticorps à l'immunoabsorbant, indiquant la présence d'anti-VLHT-III dans l'échantillon.
9. Procédé selon la revendication 8 caractérisé par le fait que l'étape de détermination de l'existence
- d'une liaison d'anti-corps à l'immunoabsorbant comprend:
- a) incubation de l'immunoabsorbant avec de l'anticorps marqué contre l'anticorps de l'espèce dont dérive le fluide biologique, puis séparation de l'immunoabsorbant de l'anticorps marqué après la période
- 65 l'incubation et détection du marqueur associé à l'immunoabsorbant ou

- b) incubation de l'immunoabsorbant avec le matériau à base VLHT-III, séparation de l'immunoabsorbant du matériau à base VLHT-III marqué; et détection du marqueur associé à l'immunoabsorbant, u
- c) incubation de l'immunoabsorbant avec de la protéine A-marquée, séparation de l'immunoabsorbant de la protéine A-marquée, et détection du marqueur associé à l'immunoabsorbant.
- 5 10. Procédé de détection d'anticorps anti VLHT-III dans un échantillon de plasma ou de sérum humain comprenant les étapes suivantes:
- a) formation d'un immunoabsorbant comprenant des billes enveloppées de matériau à base VLHT-III selon la revendication 1, l'immunoabsorbant présentant de plus ultérieurement une enveloppe protéique animale;
- 10 b) incubation de l'immunoabsorbant avec l'échantillon de plasma ou de sérum dans des conditions permettant à l'anticorps anti-VLHT-III de l'échantillon de se lier à l'immunoabsorbant;
- c) séparation de l'immunoabsorbant et de l'échantillon,
- d) incubation de l'immunoabsorbant avec un anticorps marqué anti-immunoglobuline G humaine (IgG), dans des conditions qui permettent à l'anticorps anti-immunoglobuline G humain de se lier à l'anticorps
- 15 humain anti VLHT-III lié à l'immunoabsorbant;
- e) séparation de l'immunoabsorbant de l'anticorps anti-immunoglobuline G humaine libre,
- f) évaluation du marqueur associé à l'immunoabsorbant à titre d'indication de la présence d'anticorps anti VLHT-III dans l'échantillon.
11. Procédé selon la revendication 10 caractérisé par le fait que l'anticorps anti-immunoglobuline G humaine est un anticorps animal (par exemple de chèvre) et que l'échantillon de plasma ou de sérum est dilué avec du sérum d'un animal (par exemple de chèvre) de la même espèce.
12. Procédé selon la revendication 10 ou la revendication 11 caractérisé par le fait que l'anticorps anti-immunoglobuline G humaine est marqué à l'aide d'un radio-isotope, une enzyme ou un composé fluorescent.
- 25 13. Immunoabsorbant pour utilisation en essai immunochimique en phase solide pour anticorps anti VLHT-III, caractérisé par le fait qu'il comprend une phase solide (par exemple une bille de plastique ou de verre, un récipient de plaque de microtitrage ou un tube à essai) sur laquelle est fixé un matériau à base VLHT-III selon la revendication 1 et l'immunoabsorbant par exemple comprenant une enveloppe ultérieure de protéine animale.
- 30 14. Composition de vaccin caractérisée par le fait qu'elle comprend une quantité immunogène de matériau à base HTLV-III selon la revendication 1 dans un véhicule pharmacologiquement acceptable.

Revendications pour l'état contractant: AT

- 35 1. Procédé de préparation, par exemple par des techniques à l'ADN recombinant du polypeptide 121 antigénique du virus lymphotrope de cellule humaine T du type III (VLHT-III), (ou selon la terminologie anglaise, HTLV-III polypeptide 121) de formule
- 40 Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln Leu Gln Ala
Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys
Asp Gln Gln Leu Leu Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
Ser Gly Lys Leu Ile Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
45 Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
Thr Ser Leu
- et de ces formes modifiées, caractérisé par le fait que des acides aminés ont été supprimés, insérés ou substitués sans diminuer de façon essentielle leurs propriétés immunologiques.
- 50 2. Procédé de préparation d'une protéine fusionnée contenant le polypeptide 121 VLHT-III selon la revendication 1.
3. Procédé de préparation d'un segment d'ADN vers l'VLHT-III inclus du polypeptide 121 VLHT-III selon la revendication 1; et des formes modifiées dudit segment dans lequel les nucléotides ont été supprimés, insérés ou substitués sans diminuer de façon essentielle les propriétés immunologiques du polypeptide inclus.
- 55 4. Procédé de préparation d'une protéine fusionnée selon la revendication 2 ayant la séquence suivante d'acides aminés:
- Leu Arg Pro Val Glu Thr Pro Thr Arg Glu
Ile Lys Lys Leu Asp Gly Leu Trp Ala Phe
60 Ser Leu Asp Arg Glu Asn Cys Gly Ile Asp
Gln Ala Ser Ala Val Asp Ala Cys Gly Ser
Pro
Glu Ala Gln Gln His Leu Leu Gln
Thr Val Trp Gly Ile Lys Gln L u Gln Ala
65 Arg Ile Leu Ala Val Glu Arg Tyr Leu Lys

- Asp Gln Gln Leu L u Gly Ile Trp Gly Cys
 Ser Gly Lys Leu Il Cys Thr Thr Ala Val
 Pro Trp Asn Ala Ser Trp Ser Asn Lys Ser
 Leu Glu Gln Ile Trp Asn Asn Met Thr Trp
 5 Met Glu Trp Asp Arg Glu Ile Asn Asn Tyr
 Thr Ser Leu
 Trp Gly Ser Gly Thr Arg Glu Leu Glu Phe
 Leu Lys Thr Lys Gly Pro Arg Asp Thr Pro
 Ile Phe Ile Gly
- 10 et des formes modifiées de ladite protéine fusionnée dans lesquelles des acides aminés ont été supprimés, insérés ou substitués sans diminuer de façon essentielle leurs propriétés immunologiques.
5. Procédé selon la revendication 3, dans lequel le segment d'ADN VLHT-III présente la séquence de nucléotides:
- 15 ATT GAG GCG CAA CAG CAT CTG TTG CAA CTC ACA GTC
 TGG GGC ATC AAG CAG CTC CAG GCA AGA ATC CTG GCT
 GTG GAA AGA TAC CTA AAG GAT CAA CAG CTC CTG GGG
 ATT TGG GGT TGC TCT GGA AAA CTC ATT TGC ACC ACT
 GCT GTG CCT TGG AAT GCT ACT TGG AGT AAT AAA TCT
 CTG GAA CAG ATT TGG AAT AAC ATG ACC TGG ATG GAG
 20 TGG GAC AGA GAA ATT AAC AAT TAC ACA AGC TTA
 ou des codons équivalents.
6. Procédé de préparation (a) d'un vecteur d'expression dans lequel le segment d'ADN selon la revendication 3 ou 5 est inséré, ou (b) une cellule transformée par ledit vecteur d'expression.
7. Essai immunochimique pour détecter ou quantifier dans un fluide des anticorps contre le VLHT-III, caractérisé par le fait qu'il utilise un matériau à base VLHT-III selon la revendication 1.
- 25 8. Procédé de détection d'anticorps contre le VLHT-III dans un fluide biologique caractérisé par le fait qu'il comprend les étapes suivantes:
- a) incubation d'un immunoadsorbant comprenant une phase solide à laquelle est attaché un matériau de base VLHT-III selon la revendication 1, avec un échantillon du fluide biologique à étudier, dans des conditions qui permettent à l'anticorps anti VLHT-III de l'échantillon de se lier à l'immunoadsorbant;
- 30 b) séparation de l'immunoadsorbant de l'échantillon et
 c) détermination de l'existence possible d'une liaison d'anticorps à l'immunoadsorbant, indiquant la présence d'anti-VLHT-III dans l'échantillon.
9. Procédé selon la revendication 8 caractérisé par le fait que l'étape de détermination de l'existence d'une liaison d'anti-corps à l'immunoadsorbant comprend:
- 35 a) incubation de l'immunoadsorbant avec de l'anticorps marqué contre l'anticorps de l'espèce dont dérive de fluide biologique, puis séparation de l'immunoadsorbant de l'anticorps marqué après la période l'incubation et détection du marqueur associé à l'immunoadsorbant ou
 b) incubation de l'immunoadsorbant avec le matériau à base VLHT-III, séparation de l'immunoadsorbant du matériau à base VLHT-III marqué; et détection du marqueur associé à l'immunoadsorbant, ou
 40 c) incubation de l'immunoadsorbant avec de la protéine A marquée, séparation de l'immunoadsorbant de la protéine A, et détection du marqueur associé à l'immunoadsorbant.
10. Procédé de détection d'anticorps anti VLHT-III dans un échantillon de plasma ou de sérum humain comprenant les étapes suivantes:
- 45 a) formation d'un immunoadsorbant comprenant des billes enveloppées de matériau à base VLHT-III selon la revendication 1, l'immunoadsorbant présentant de plus ultérieurement une enveloppe protéique animale;
- b) incubation de l'immunoadsorbant avec l'échantillon de plasma ou de sérum dans des conditions permettant à l'anticorps anti-VLHT-III de l'échantillon de se lier à l'immunoadsorbant;
- 50 c) séparation de l'immunoadsorbant et de l'échantillon;
- d) incubation de l'immunoadsorbant avec un anticorps marqué anti-immunoglobuline G humaine (IgG), dans des conditions qui permettent à l'anticorps anti-immunoglobuline G humain de se lier à l'anticorps humain anti VLHT-III lié à l'immunoadsorbant;
- e) séparation de l'immunoadsorbant de l'anticorps anti-immunoglobuline G humaine libre;
- 55 f) évaluation du marqueur associé à l'immunoadsorbant à titre d'indication de la présence d'anticorps anti VLHT-III dans l'échantillon.
11. Procédé selon la revendication 10 caractérisé par le fait que l'anticorps anti-immunoglobuline G humaine est un anticorps animal (par exemple de chèvre) et que l'échantillon de plasma ou de sérum est dilué avec du sérum d'un animal (par exemple de chèvre) de la même espèce.
- 60 12. Procédé selon la revendication 10 ou la revendication 11 caractérisé par le fait que l'anticorps anti-immunoglobuline G humaine est marqué à l'aide d'un radio-isotope, une enzyme ou un composé fluorescent.
13. Procédé de préparation d'un immunoadsorbant pour utilisation en essai immunochimique en phase solide pour anticorps anti VLHT-III, comprenant une phase solide, par exemple une bille de verre ou de plastique, un récipient de plaque de microtitrage ou un tube à essai, sur laquelle est fixé un matériau à ba-
- 65

se VLHT-III selon la revendication 1 et un immunoabsorbant, par exemple, comprenant une enveloppe ultérieure de protéine animale.

14. Procédé de préparation d'une composition de vaccin comprenant une quantité immunogène de matériau à base HTLV-III selon la revendication 1 dans un véhicule pharmacologiquement acceptable.

5

10

15

20

25

30

35

40

45

50

55

60

65

FIG.1



